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DEFENSE ISSUES

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The services agree with nearly all the recommendations of the Kassebaum Baker panel on gender-integrated training. The secretary adds three more areas he wants the services to improve.

Volume 13 Number 25

Cohen, Chairman Respond to Gender-Integration Report

Press conference remarks by Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen and Gen. Henry H. Shelton, USA, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and excerpts of follow-on question-answer session, Washington, Mar. 15, 1998.

Cohen. Last summer I appointed a group of distinguished Americans led by former Sen. Nancy Kassebaum Baker to review the military training and related matters that were affecting the military. We needed to examine this issue with a fresh perspective.

I think it should be clear that our all-volunteer force, a force that has produced the best military in the world, cannot meet its obligations without the continued strong contribution of men and women working together.

It should also be clear that training is the key to an effective and ready force. So the task of the Kassebaum Baker committee was a crucial one. It should be noted that the members of the committee have been in the forefront of expanding opportunities for women in the military and it's a position that I have also supported throughout my public career.

The members of the committee have performed exemplary service for us, and we're in their debt. Their recommendations are going to make a lasting and significant contribution.

I also want to note the contribution made by the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. DACOWITS surveyed the attitudes and the views of recruits and trainers and they provided invaluable advice.

Last week the services responded to my tasking to examine the Kassebaum Baker recommendations. The services recognized a number of deficiencies, and they have agreed to make changes in these areas. These changes include the following:

- o The need to increase the number of female recruiters.
- o The need to increase the number of female trainers.
- o The need to implement better selection processes for trainers, and more clarity in trainer authority.
- o The need to institute training to produce professional relationships between the genders without the use of such expedient, gender-based policies as no talk/no touch.
- o The need to re-examine the recruiting advertising to put more emphasis upon patriotism and challenge.
- o The need to place a greater emphasis on core military values in training.
- o The need to develop a more consistent training standard between the genders.##

I believe that correcting these deficiencies is going to serve as a good start in the reform effort, and I am

today directing the services to report back to me within 30 days with a detailed plan on how each of these steps are going to be implemented.

But I also think these steps are not enough. Basic training is the crucial period when young Americans make the transition from civilian to military life. We must do more to ensure that basic training provides the skills [and] the discipline necessary to become a valuable member of our armed forces.

So today I am directing additional action in three key areas of basic training:

- o Leadership and the value placed on training.
- o The rigor of training.
- o Recruit billeting.##

Progress in addressing the seven areas of deficiencies that were acknowledged by the services and the three additional areas that I have identified are going to help create the proper environment for basic training, so first let me touch upon the issue of leadership.

To counter any notion that a training assignment is detrimental to a military career, I am directing the services to develop a system of rewards and incentives that emphasize the value of serving as a trainer. The crucial task of training can be accomplished only through the assignment of the most highly skilled and motivated noncommissioned officers who are led by experienced quality officers.

We owe a great deal of debt to today's drill instructors, the drill sergeants, the recruit division commanders and the military training instructors. These men and women are making extraordinary efforts to train our recruits working sometimes 90 to 100 hours a week, making enormous sacrifices. The actions that I'm outlining today are intended to help them do a better job, [and] to make sure that their value is recognized. And I am determined to establish a consistent policy to make sure that we always have the best to train the best.

Second, on the matter of training rigor: We have to produce fit, disciplined, [and] motivated soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. We must pay special attention to physical fitness, but this is only a first step. We need to provide realistic and challenging field exercises that are instructive and push individuals to achieve their maximum potential, so I'm directing the services to re-evaluate and to toughen the training and physical fitness standards.

Third, I am directing the services to ensure that male and female basic trainees live in separate areas, if not in separate buildings. The facilities must be well-supervised at all times by training professionals and foster an environment that is free from distractions as these young men and women who are seeking to make crucial transitions from civilian to military life.

Our goal is a basic training system which provides greater privacy and dignity and safe, secure, living conditions. The services are going to report back to me within 30 days on the steps they'll be taking to achieve these three concrete goals. Once the services implement the corrective measures on all of the deficiencies that I've outlined, I will then be able to evaluate the need for further action in response to the Kassebaum Baker panel recommendations on altering small-unit gender integration during basic training.

We need to provide our young men and women with the absolute best training for success in the military missions, and I believe that a vigorous execution of these steps will improve the basic training system.

With that, let me entertain your questions.

Q. Mr. Secretary, your recommendation, housing these recruits in separate areas if not separate buildings, appears to be somewhat controversial. How does that differ from how these trainees are separated now, and how would you answer the question that that's a rollback on advances that have been

made for women in the past?

A. It's not a rollback. What we want to do is foster an environment in which there is privacy that is maintained; in which there is a secure living arrangement for men and women. To the extent that it's possible, then certainly separate facilities would be recommended. To the extent that it's not possible or feasible given either financial restraints, or others, I want to see barriers that are put up that will indeed provide for separate living accommodations that cannot be easily transgressed.

I want to have 24-hour supervision to make sure that the focus of the trainees is upon becoming warriors capable of defending this country's national security interests. During that initial phase of their basic training, their concentration must be on developing the skills necessary to achieve that status, and not on any kind of social integration following (duty) hours.

So to the extent that it can be achieved within existing facilities, those facilities must contain the kind of restraint or barriers that would be, I think, necessary to provide that kind of separation.

Q. If you're trying to teach these young men and women to work together and fight together --

A. They don't have to sleep together.

Q. But they don't sleep together now.

A. We're trying to address the issue of whether there has been adequate supervision in a number of facilities during their basic training where doors have been removed from those buildings in which you have housing of both male and female; in which they have not had adequate supervision; [and] in which there has been an attitude of a lack of discipline. So what we want to do is maintain the separation during those first weeks of basic training to make sure their focus is on the military aspects and not the social.

Q. Are you saying that gender-integrated training in and of itself will be maintained?

A. Yes. Until I see what the results are going to be from these changes, then I reserve that judgment. But I think it's important that we take all of the steps that have been outlined. These constitute the majority of the Kassebaum Baker report. The services have agreed with virtually 95 percent of the recommendations or higher. The areas that I've outlined here, the three separate areas, are the ones that I would like to focus on in addition to the ones they've agreed need to be addressed.

Q. The issue of finances, however, in terms of the cost for increasing this separation -- how are you going to address that with the services?

A. They're going to come back in the next 30 days and tell me exactly what it's going to take in the way of improving the facilities to ensure that. It may be a question of erecting the kind of doors that open one direction, set off alarms should anyone try to have entrance as opposed to exiting from them. It has to do with making sure there is 24-hour supervision so that the trainers also are carrying on their duties beyond the regular day.

Q. [not audible] ... any of that yet.

A. No, they have not. That's why they've come back with their comments in terms of the report itself. They've agreed to a number of the deficiencies that I've outlined and I want them to tell me now how they're going to address them. They have 30 days to do that. In addition, the other areas I've mentioned as far as leadership, rigorous training and billeting, which they'll have to do also in the next 30 days.

Q. Was it cost that kept you from going to separate barracks?

A. Not entirely. The question of feasibility, in terms of, we have roughly 14 percent women making up our military today. That's likely to increase in the future, but the cost factor in erecting new facilities --

do you plan for 18 percent, 20 percent? Do you have excess overhead at that point when you can't quite rationalize it at this point. So it's a factor, but it's not the dispositive factor. It also had to do with how the Navy, for example, feels it should train by housing in the same facility but having separate barriers, much as they would do in a ship. So it's a factor, but not the dispositive factor.

Q. Are you satisfied that the services took Kassebaum Baker seriously? That they made a good faith effort to implement her recommendations?

A. I don't think there has been an effort made to implement them fully as yet. I met with the [service chiefs] this morning. I outlined basically what I was going to say today at this press conference. They had an opportunity to make a presentation to [Deputy Secretary John J.] Hamre and others, to [Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Rudy] de Leon last week. I believe they are in agreement with the basic thrust, and I would again say between 90 [percent] and 95 percent of the Kassebaum Baker report they have agreed to. I want additional focus on these three key areas, and I want their recommendation [on] how they're fully going to implement the Kassebaum Baker report itself.

Q. When Nancy Kassebaum Baker presented this, she described a lot of these recommendations as common sense recommendations, including this one about separate housing. What was the objection of the service chiefs to having more. What was the goal in not changing anything?

A. I think the services looked at it -- in terms of the Navy, by way of example, [as trying] to replicate in training what they're going to have in the field. Each service feels it is trying to train the individuals as they will, in fact, go out into the field. So you have a different approach by each service.

My concern is that we have separateness of living conditions as such, and if it can be achieved through separate facilities then we should do that. If it cannot, and is inconsistent with the training methods adopted by the services, then we will keep them in the same buildings. But there must be separate areas for women and men, and we are going to insist upon that, and the services agreed to that.

Q. You haven't addressed the major recommendation of Kassebaum Baker, which is that, at the smallest unit level, they be same gender units in basic training. The other services don't seem to like that too much. The Marines pretty much do that. Why haven't you addressed that?

A. First of all, it is not the major recommendation in the Kassebaum Baker report. That's a misreading of the report. She, in fact, and her committee recommended as a part of the overall report that I have outlined here that [issue] be considered, and it would apply only in about 30 percent of the time. Seventy percent of the time there would be fully integrated training, with the exception of the Marines. So it is a smaller part of the Kassebaum Baker Report.

I have discussed this with her, and frankly, I think she feels that these recommendations that we are making are very positive and I think she has a positive reaction to this approach.

What we're saying is, if you make all of these changes in the training, the trainers, that you establish high standards, that you have these incentives for the individuals you change this rule about don't look/don't touch, you make a lot of these artificial distinctions that have been made in the past, [and] if you eliminate them, then that may be the best way to address this issue. If that is insufficient, then we will look at having separate training for smaller units.

Q. If I could address a question to the chairman, perhaps. I'm wondering how these problems that you're addressing have manifested themselves out in the field when he has to deploy forces. ... What problems do you see in the field have cropped up because of problems with mixed-gender training?

Shelton. I think across a period of time we've seen a number of examples of things that haven't gone the way that any of us would like for them to have gone. ...

This is a very critical phase that we're dealing with here, the initial entry training, and the transformation

of young men and women from civilians into America's military force. That means that we need to imbue them with the values, with the training, [and] with the discipline necessary to integrate rapidly into and be a part of an effective force that's prepared to fight.

Q. How hard over were your service chiefs in not wanting to implement some of the Kassebaum recommendations, for example the small unit training, with the secretary kicking that can down the road for 30 days at least. Was it war within the service chiefs?

Shelton. I think to the contrary. As the secretary mentioned, they in fact bought into about 90 [percent to] 95 percent right off the bat. There are only three areas they really needed some more time, or an additional look. The ones that the secretary mentioned, such as in the integrated training, that will continue as it is right now until we've had a chance to assess what these other changes have resulted in regarding the recommendations made by the Kassebaum Baker panel in that regard. Then, of course, the fix to the living conditions, and also the quality, and the quantity, and the training of our instructors and the incentives provided for them. ...

Q. Mr. Secretary, perhaps the answer here is obvious, but how will the increased number of female recruiters and trainers curb sexual harassment?

Cohen. This is a recommendation of the Kassebaum Baker report and one that we strongly endorse, that there need to be more role models for women in the military. It's not to say that women will only be training women. Quite to the contrary. We will have women also training men. But there needs to be a higher level of presence of women as trainers. It has to do with establishing good role models and also identification on the part of the young trainees with some of their own gender. That's very helpful in building up their confidence.

When you take young people at such an age, and one in which their character is going to be tested during this period of time and developed, then any type of role model reinforcement you can have would be to the better. So that's one of the factors involved.

Q. Mr. Secretary, where are you going to get those women? You just don't pull a chief petty officer off the street, or a senior drill sergeant.

A. That's true. The same is true with respect to looking at our processes for selecting the male trainers as well. We want to make sure that we get the highest quality individual who will go into that billet. There has not been enough emphasis on the part of the services in the past. It has been seen by some as not career enhancing. We want to make sure that it is seen as career enhancing. So it's going to take some time. It's not going to be overnight. You're simply going to draw these people out.

The services are now going to make a very concerted effort to go and look for the best people that they can find and to give the kind of career enhancement incentives that will draw them to that billet. So it's not going to happen, let me make this clear, in 30 days. I'm not suggesting this is going to take place in 30 days, but they have to have a plan that's going to be implemented that will lead to this result.

Q. Will any of these recommendations that you're making result in an increased separation of men and women in basic training, during the actual training?

A. The answer is no.

Q. Are you convinced that the system works, the military justice system works in protecting the rights of women from being abused?

A. As I said before, we are not going to tolerate the abuse of women in the military. If there is evidence of abuse, harassment, any sort of misuse of positions of responsibility and power, and there is evidence of that, it will be investigated and prosecuted under the law.

Q. That's your policy. I'm just asking whether the policy is working. Do you think it's working?

A. I would say we have a good military justice system.

Q. Back to the ... question about where you're going to get the women for the recruiting and the training. The services have a problem of finding enough senior NCOs [noncommissioned officers] from women, and if you take women for recruiters and trainers, you're taking them out of the field where they need them as role models and leaders. Particularly the Navy has a problem. When they send women aboard a ship they want to make sure they have a number of chief petty officers and senior petty officers to help those women. You're taking from a very limited pool.

A. The object will be to increase the pool as much as possible.

Having these trainers of the highest quality is something that is indispensable to producing ready, trained troops, as such. So if you put the emphasis up front on the training, that is going to serve you well as far as the operational conduct of those individuals are concerned.

So what we want to do is to do exactly what the Marine Corps has been doing, by way of example, and putting stress upon the initial training facet of this transformation that's taking place. To the extent that there are limitations, we want to increase the pool from which they're going to draw. But nonetheless, we're going to put a high premium on getting qualified people, the most qualified we can, into those positions, because we believe an investment up front will pay bigger dividends later.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said it will take some time to implement this, but how do you measure or quantify the progress? Is that included in your recommendation? Are there targets?

A. I will have to see what the recommendations are in terms of the implementation, and then I will have to make a judgment in conjunction with the chairman, the vice chairman and others as we review the progress that's being made during the course of the year. I'm not going to set any artificial standards, but rather try to make an assessment -- have we dealt adequately with the leadership issue, have we been able to increase the people who are eager to come into the training billets as such, [and] have we provided for the separate separation of the genders as far as their sleeping accommodations? Those things we can measure and we will do that during the course of the coming months.

Q. You mentioned the importance of 24-hour supervision for these trainees. Are you going to be separating female trainees from male supervisors overnight and vice versa? Or will men be supervising them around the clock?

A. Men will continue to be supervising. If we had female trainers, they would continue to be supervising. It's not simply women supervising women or men supervising men. We're not going to have that.

Q. That will be during the sleeping hours as well?

A. That will be during the sleeping hours as well.

Q. Have you made these recommendations only for the basic training?

A. Yes.

Q. So that the recommendations in Kassebaum Baker were also for the advanced training.

A. Actually, all of it was for basic, as I read the report. Focused solely on basic at this point. ...

Q. You mentioned that this focuses mostly on basic training. Why is that? Most of the problems that we've seen at Aberdeen and some of the other training bases have been in the advanced training and not the basic training. Why are you fixing the part where we haven't seen the problem?

A. The Kassebaum Baker report really did focus upon the basic training as well. Some of the sentiments that were expressed by the recruits to the panel, some of the problems that were identified certainly contributed to the problems that were later surfaced during advanced training. If you talk about Aberdeen, there was clearly a failure of leadership. And there are failures throughout the system as such that we believe have been generated by some of the misperceptions and perhaps attitudes that were developed during basic. So if we can fix the problem at basic, we believe it will have a continuum of influence throughout the advanced and MOS [military occupational specialty] assignments.

Q. Mr. Secretary, the current no talk/no touch policy in effect at many of the training sites between male and female recruits, is it your objective to get rid of that policy?

A. Yes.

Q. Why not issue a directive to that effect right now then and end it?

A. That is included in the directive going to the service.

Q. Then in fact it will be ended?

A. They have agreed that that is a policy that no longer should be adhered to.

Q. Do you think these changes would have prevented what happened at Aberdeen if they'd been in effect?

A. If you have proper supervision, if you have a leadership that is in charge of the facility, if you have clear lines of authority and responsibility, then you have an opportunity to reduce the chances of something like that happening at Aberdeen. There was clearly a failure of leadership at Aberdeen. So hopefully, if we change some of the attitudes that have been expressed by individuals in the military, then this will carry through all phases and all facets of military service.

No one can give you that assurance, but we are taking this -- I think the Kassebaum Baker panel made an important contribution and this reflects virtually an adoption of almost all of the recommendations. The only question that will remain open will be should we go to the separate gender training in the smallest units, and that I reserve judgment on; but everything else I think has been highly constructive and will be implemented.

Q. Did your office release the service input to you in this regard?

A. I think the services can perhaps comment on that. The drafts have been submitted to me last week, we have the full reports as of today, I believe this morning, and I have no problem with having those released.

Q. Mr. Secretary ... the services in recruit training are making a balance as far as the rigor of their training. It's hard to get kids into the service these days, and they don't want to lose them by what they call breaking them in training, so they have to kind of balance the kids that come in, the few kids they get, some of them in not very good physical condition, and try not to either break them or push them out by too much pressure. Is that a concern?

A. Obviously some judgment has to be exercised, but the physical standards have not been demanding enough and I have been rather surprised to find that I perhaps can do more of the physical activity than some of the recruits -- even at my advanced age. I think that does not bode well for those young people. What we want to do is produce fit, physically capable and well-disciplined troops. To the extent that they need to enhance those physical requirements, I strongly endorse that. I don't think we should be making exceptions for people who are unwilling to get in the best possible physical condition and also be challenged. The notion that you would -- the Navy had a policy of holding up stress, [and] that no longer is going to be in effect. The notion that a drill sergeant cannot grab a rifle out of the hand of a recruit without asking permission is no longer going to be tolerated. Those things have to change, and

they will change. ...

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